

Hoover's notes

Dear Dave,

9/13/79

FBI paper makes a fascinating study. It is always self-serving, the first law being the protection of the Bureau, and its fidelity to fact if not its honesty must unfortunately always be questioned. (Omissions, distortions and unreal interpretations are more common than outright lies.) The riddles will never be solved, undoubtedly one of the original intentions, because too many seemingly reasonable interpretations are possible. And the great mass of the paper complicates this while also being a means of denial of access. Who can find anything in more than 100,000 pages, or be sure there is not a contradictory record?

One of the more fascinating questions to me is the meaning to be given to the notes Hoover added to records.

Off and on for years I've heard questions asked about how much in control he was at the time of the JFK assassination - meaning compared with the control he exercised before then. More recently an former agent suggested to me that by then the "palace guard" had taken over.

There is an unreality to some of these notes and they always appear to be self-serving, yet there is also the suggestion that the old man might not have known otherwise. Certainly all the paper created, the special formulations employed could have led him to believe what his notes reflect, yet it is not easy to believe.

Lately I've been reading the Commission file (62-109090) from the beginning. I'm in the eighth section. There are more of his notes per page in these sections than in the many others I've read as I've worked my way through the records.

It is because I believe that historians will wonder forever about how much in actual control Hoover was that I call this to your attention.

It is almost as though all the records were created to form his mind. But there is a difference between this being the purpose and the effect.

Comprehension is impossible without subject expertise. Those without detailed factual knowledge are certain to be misled by this great volume of bureaucratic paper and what it says.

Hoover's great fear appears to have been that the FBI would be damaged. His descriptions of Warren are as his enemy, of Warren and the Commission being out to get the FBI, which could hardly be farther from the truth. He ordered all sorts of things to avoid this, or what he anticipated that wasn't there.

Yet it seems impossible that in his complaints about the FBI taking what he called a narrow view of Commission requests he was not aware of the FBI's purposes in taking narrow views - not to disclose what a correct interpretation of Commission requests would have required or led to. (An example is the FBI's omission of Hosty from its betyping of the Oswald addressbook.)

The political manipulations are important and clear enough although probably far from complete. The use of the right extreme in the Congress is apparent, as are the relationships. So is the forming of the conclusions the Commission could or would reach prior to its beginnings, the manipulations to prevent Warren Olney from being general counsel and getting Rankin in - the FBI and Hoover liked him based on past experiences with him.

Whenever anything was written about any request from the Commission that anyone in the FBI hierarchy might have had a question about or that could be taken as criticism always began with an account of the praise Rankin heaped on the FBI for its work. If that record reached Hoover.... And of course, with what it knew of him the Commission would likely have taken this kind of approach. But it was not in any record. ...Everything the FBI did was right and everyone else was its enemy. The paranoia also is clear enough. ... This hasty note intended to add to a fascinating puzzle all the pieces of which will never be put in place.